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SUBJECT The Resignation of Admiral Inman

BOB EDWARDS: The number two man in the Central Intelligence Agency has submitted his resignation. The Agency's Deputy Director, Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, told President Reagan of his decision a month ago, and yesterday the President accepted that resignation with deep regret.

NPR's Alan Burlow has this report.

ALAN BURLOW: Inman was one of the most highly respected and trusted intelligence officers in the country. He is the man many congressmen, senators, and intelligence professionals hoped would be appointed CIA Director when President Reagan took office. He is also the man many hoped would replace CIA Director William Casey when he came under fire from the Senate Intelligence Committee last year.

Even during Casey's own confirmation hearings, Bobby Inman emerged as everybody's favorite spy. Senator Barry Goldwater urged Casey to hire Inman as his deputy, and others, including Joseph Biden, joined the chorus of praise for Inman.

SENATOR JOSEPH BIDEN: Unquestionably the absolute best person in every respect that has ever testified before this committee is Admiral Inman. In my opinion, he's the single most competent man that exists in the entire United States of America regarding the intelligence community. He is super, super competent, forthcoming, honest, and very, very, very, very good.

BURLOW: So why is Inman leaving? Inman says he accepted the job of Deputy CIA Director to help rebuild the Agency but that he accepted it reluctantly. Inman did not want to leave the National Security Agency, which he headed, to take the number two job at CIA.

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One source who discussed the resignation with Inman quoted him as saying it was difficult for someone with his personality to work under someone else. Inman told the President he felt it was time to move on to fresh challenges.

A congressional source said Inman has had several extremely lucrative offers from private industry, offers he did not care to discuss. Inman says money, specifically, the need to put two sons through college, was an important factor in his decision.

There are also reports, however, of policy disagreements between Inman and Casey. Casey insists suggestions that he and Inman had anything less than a good working relationship are, quote, a goddamned lie and irresponsible. Inman also said policy differences were not the reason he was leaving.

It is no secret that Inman has fought hard to defend his views of the mission of the CIA, and that Inman's views have not always squared with those of others in the Agency and the White House. Inman resisted efforts to greatly expand CIA spying within the United States, but he eventually endorsed a Reagan Executive Order which did increase CIA authority to spy on Americans, and for the first time gave the Agency limited authority to conduct covert operations within the United States. Inman said the Order, which was released last December, protected the rights of Americans.

ADMIRAL BOBBY INMAN: There must be no doubt that the rights of Americans will be respected and preserved during the course of intelligence activities that may affect them.

BURLow: there is no word on a successor to Inman. He could leave as early as June, or as late as Labor Day. He told the President he would stay until a successor is found.

I'm Alan Burlow in Washington.